

# Far West Ski Association

presents the **Snowsports Builder Award** to



## *Fritz Buser — Owner & Developer Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe*

**Fritz Buser** became an early investor in Mt. Rose after meeting some of the founders at the ski shows he attended annually for the previous twenty years promoting Henke boots. He became the company's majority shareholder in 1971 and has controlled the growth and direction of Mt. Rose ever since.

Fritz was born in the small Swiss farming village of Hemmiken in 1921. Still in his teens, on the eve of World War II, he began his first business venture – trading sardines. In his early twenties – at the end of World War II. Fritz decided it was time to think bigger... America. He secured agreements with various prominent Swiss manufacturers to represent their products as a salesman in the United States, including the ski boot company 'Henke.' It was the first company that produced buckled (vs. laced) boots. Eventually, he acquired principal ownership rights of the Henke boot company.

Mount Rose Ski Tahoe's history began in the 1930's. Long before any chairlifts were constructed or even an all weather road, Reno locals were skiing in the area. Shortly after World War II, the Sky Tavern Lodge was established. It continues to operate today in the same location southwest of Reno. It is now owned by the City of Reno and operated by Ski Tavern Junior Ski Program.

Devoted skiers from Sky Tavern hiked up to the 9,700-foot peak of adjacent Slide Mountain and skied in the location of the present Mt. Rose – Ski Tahoe. The original Reno Ski Bowl was constructed on the east slope of Slide Mountain (currently the East Bowl of Mt. Rose) and was at one point connected to the Sky Tavern via a lift that took skiers to the base of the Reno Ski Bowl.

The 60's saw substantial changes on the slopes of Slide Mountain. The Reno Ski Bowl evolved into the Slide Mountain Ski Area. In 1964, the north face of Slide Mountain became the Mt. Rose Ski Area. The Mt. Rose Development Company was formed to direct the future of the ski resort and in 1971 Fritz Buser became the owner.

For many years "Slide" and "Rose" operated independently of each other, both expanding in their own ways with more lifts and lodge improvements. The 1984-85 season saw the 20th anniversary of Mt. Rose operations along with two new chairlifts.

The "Iron Curtain" between Slide and Rose finally came down in 1987 when Mt. Rose acquired the Slide Mountain Ski Area terrain under a lease agreement with the U.S. Forest Service. The "Slide Side" (as it is affectionately referred to by locals) became the East Bowl of Mt. Rose. The combination of the two ski areas increased the overall terrain of Mt. Rose to 900+ acres and established the resort as a significant player in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

As Mt. Rose-Ski Tahoe moved into the 90's, improvements continued to take place on the hill with new lifts added that vastly increased uphill capacity and aided in boosting the overall image of the resort.

The 1994-95 season shined as the 30th anniversary for Mt. Rose and this landmark year produced some of the most significant facility improvements in the resorts history; a 2.5 million dollar remodel of the main lodge which included a BBQ deck and a 300 percent expansion of the indoor dining area. Top-to-bottom snowmaking was also introduced to the resort in the late 90's giving the mountain the insurance policy it needed to have consistent early season openings. Mt. Rose screamed into the 21st century with its first high speed lifts, giving Mt. Rose dual high speed, base-to summit rides to the top.

In the separation between the east and north slopes of Slide Mountain lives the extreme terrain known as The Chutes. There was a time when skiers were allowed in the Chutes area at their own risk. The mid-1960's saw the closure of this area until its official opening in 2004. After 10 years of groundwork, Mt. Rose officially adopted these 200 acres into its trail system including the addition of the Chuter lift providing an exit back to the Slide Lodge.

In 2009, the old Slide Lodge, which had evolved from the Reno Ski Bowl days as a simple warming hut through six additions, was demolished and replaced with the Winters Creek Lodge. It features a steel and glass design to bring facets of the mountain into the architecture of the facility.

Fritz's son Kurt has been executive of the company for the past 20 years, overseeing the more recent development. The resort was offered for sale two years ago, but after testing the open market and receiving no offers, Fritz, now living in Switzerland, transferred control to his children and grandchildren.

Respectfully nominated by *Steve Coxen*.